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SUBJECT: OMAN MEDIA REACTION: NEW YEAR, OLD CONCERNS

11. SUMMARY: With the majority of publications moving into the new year focusing solely on local issues, including the state budget and worsening traffic, limited international editorial content decried continuing unrest in Iraq, noted positive signs in reduced Palestinian aggression against Israel, and looked with hopeful caution for results in the wake of the President's Cairo speech. END SUMMARY.

IRAQ: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

12. On December 31, private Arabic daily "al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) gloomily reviewed the situation in Iraq, asking "Isn't it Time to Stop Iraqi Bleeding?":

"It is the eighth year of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq and the destruction of its infrastructure, wealth, humanity, culture, and civilization. Despite all efforts to sooth its pain, Iraq is still bleeding, reaping the misery sowed by violent attacks targeting children and women, young and old... There is no way to tighten the noose on these hidden powers and expel them from Iraq except by embracing all components of the Iraqi people, in all walks of life, with all the country's sects and ethnicities, and by restructuring its entire political process and institutions, rebuilding them on a solid base. The time has come for the Iraqis to regain their freedom and contentment and stop bloodletting. The invaders or occupiers of any sort will only service their own interests and fulfill their own dreams, not those of Iraqis."

LESS AGGRESSION, MORE NEGOTIATION

13. On January 1, "Al Watan" noted with approval Palestinian willingness to pursue peace as evidenced by the Israeli announcement of decreased attacks in 2009, calling it "Messages in Exchange of Messages":

"Israel has announced a significant reduction in the number of attacks against them in 2009. They may interpret this decline as the result of aggressive policies against the Palestinians to appease their leaders of the war. However, this should be seen as a move on the Palestinian part toward peace... When Israel demanded an end to violence prior to negotiations, the Palestinian negotiators responded to the pressure by intermediaries by pushing for a cessation to armed resistance and the transition to political action and negotiations, cutting short Israeli excuses that they lack a partner with which to negotiate."

HOPE FOR "REAL LIFE" OUTCOMES FROM CAIRO SPEECH

14. On January 3, senior pundit Essa al Zadjali used his weekly column in sister dailies "Al Shabiba" (Arabic, circulation 20,000) and "Times of Oman" (English, circulation 25,000) to ask "Will 2010 be a Year of Peace and Harmony?" He noted political and economic developments in the region and internationally, honing in on the Palestinian question:

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"The hope for a solution to this important issue had almost evaporated during the time of the former US administration led by George W. Bush despite his sweet-sounding promise of an independent Palestinian state... This hope has, however, resurfaced with the current US President Barack Obama assuming office and has indeed soared after his bold and candid speech at the University of Cairo... There is no denying the fact that signs of a breakthrough of sorts have been in the air ever since Obama took office in the US. But what we aspire and hope for are practical steps that would translate Obama's Cairo speech into policies and decisions with results in real life."
Schmierer